

## The Spirit of Adoption

Romans 8:12–17<sup>1</sup>

### How I Am to Thank God.

As we saw last Lord's Day, "we are debtors," according to Romans 8, verse 12, but "not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh."<sup>2</sup> Rather, we are debtors—we have an obligation—to God, who by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh has condemned sin, but who also sent His Holy Spirit to be with us and in us, to set us free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. In other words, we have a debt to the God who saved us. We have an obligation to live in a manner worthy of the Son, who gave Himself for us, and worthy of the calling that we have received to be the people of God in this world.

This is why, when the Catechism asks us what we must know to live and die in the joy of knowing that we belong to God, we are taught to answer:

Three things: first, how great my sin and misery are...

(so, Romans chapters 1 – 3),

...second, how I am set free from all my sins and misery...

(Romans 3, verse 21 – at least chapter 8, verse 1), and,

...third, how I am to thank God for such deliverance.<sup>3</sup>

Of course, we have this tendency to think that if thanksgiving is an obligation, then it's not really all that thankful, and admittedly, there are times: the child forced to thank his grandmother for the sweater; the long-suffering wife who has just received a new vacuum cleaner on her wedding anniversary; the list could go on and on. But in this case, if we really understand the first two—how great our sin and misery are, and also the price that was paid so that we could be set free—then our thankfulness can't really be anything but genuine.

If we really believe that He has fully paid for all our sin with his precious blood, and has set us free from the tyranny of the devil, and that He watches over us in such a way that not a hair can fall from our heads apart from His sovereign will, then we should simply overflow with gratitude for the grace and mercy of God. If we really believe that

<sup>1</sup> There is therefore now **no condemnation** for those who are in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup> For the law of the Spirit of life has set [us] free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. Romans

8:1–2 ESV

then, when we hear a few verses later that we have an obligation, it doesn't strike us as a burden. As we read in 1 John, chapter 5:

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture citations, unless otherwise noted, *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Romans 8:12.

<sup>3</sup> ed., CRCNA (Christian Reformed Church in North America), "The Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 2", *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Faith Alive Publications, 1988), 13.

<sup>1</sup> Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. <sup>2</sup> By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments.

But especially 1 John 5, verse 3:

<sup>3</sup> For this is the love of God...

first of all,

...that we keep his commandments.

(which is exactly what it means to live according to the Spirit, by the way). But also, that

...his commandments are not burdensome. <sup>1 John 5:1-3</sup> ESV

So, again,

<sup>12</sup> ...we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. <sup>13</sup> For if you live according to the flesh you will die...

(which, granted, is pretty depressing), **but** on the other hand,

...if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. <sup>Romans 8:12-13</sup> ESV

### **By the Spirit.**

And just how are we to do that? How are we to put to death the misdeeds of the body (the works of the flesh, as Paul calls them in Galatians 5). Well, the answer is right there in the text. We put to death—we mortify—the deeds of the body *by the Spirit*.

It is by the Spirit, and only by the Spirit. There is no method, no program, no amount of will-power, no accountability partner, that could ever do so apart from Him. By the way, none of those things I just mentioned are necessarily bad considered in themselves. They may even be helpful to a point. They're just inadequate apart from the work of God through His Holy Spirit.

In truth, we've been considering this all along now. Romans 8, verses 3 and 4:

<sup>3</sup> For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, <sup>4</sup> in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us...

And who are we talking about here? Well, those

<sup>4</sup> ...**who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.** <sup>Romans 8:3-4</sup> ESV

Then, verse 5,

<sup>5</sup> For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live **according to the Spirit** set their minds on the things of the Spirit. <sup>Romans 8:5</sup>

ESV

What does that mean? We saw it negatively expressed in verse 7.

<sup>7</sup> For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Romans 8:7 ESV

Which is to say that the mind set on the things of the Spirit is not hostile to God, because it can and does submit to God's law. It is in this sense that

<sup>10</sup> ...if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. Romans 8:10 ESV

If Christ is in you—if you have the Spirit of Christ, and everyone who is in Christ does—then although the body is dead and could, on its own, only do the things that dead men do, the Spirit (the Holy Spirit of God who is not only with you but in you), is life, and through Him, we put to death the things of death, even as the Spirit gives us life and power to walk in the righteousness of Christ. Paul said the same thing in Galatians 5:

<sup>16</sup> But I say, walk by the Spirit...

(live according to the Spirit; set your mind on the things of the Spirit; submit to the law—the rule—of the Spirit),

...and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. Galatians 5:16 ESV

And why not? It's simply a matter of fruit—of nature—as we have seen before. For

<sup>22</sup> ...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Galatians 5:22–23 ESV

And it's probably worth a mention that the works of the flesh in Galatians 5 are not set in contrast to the "works" of the Spirit. It's the works of the flesh—the things that those who are in the flesh do—versus the fruit of the Spirit. Like a good tree that brings forth good fruit, it's just the *nature* of those who have received the Spirit to bear the fruit of the Spirit.

And I know I've used this illustration before, but think for a moment about Lazarus, the friend of Jesus whom He raised from the dead in John chapter 11. He was dead. He had been in the tomb for four days already, and it should go without saying that during that whole time he had been doing what dead things do. That's why Martha, when Jesus commanded that the stone be taken away from the mouth of the tomb, said,

<sup>39</sup> ... "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days." John 11:39 ESV

The old King James Version, with a delightful twist of phrase, reads,

<sup>39</sup> ... Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days. John 11:39 KJV4

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<sup>4</sup> *The Holy Bible: King James Version., electronic ed. of the 1769 edition of the 1611 Authorized Version.* (Bellingham WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1995), Jn 11:39.

And that was to be expected. It is the nature of dead things to be dead, and dead things decay. But Jesus had delayed His arrival in Bethany for this very minute, so He insisted. He said to Martha,

<sup>40</sup> ...“Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?”

which might have seemed a little obscure for those who were standing there beside tomb. Regardless,

<sup>41</sup> ...they took away the stone. And Jesus...

standing there in the face of all history and reason,

...lifted up his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me.

which is like saying, “Father, I know that my prayer has already been answered,” but, He went on:

<sup>42</sup> I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.”

And,

<sup>43</sup> When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.” John 11:40–43 ESV

Now, what happened next should come as a surprise to no one. This is the Son of God, after all, and Jesus had already thanked God for hearing His prayer even before He spoke the words. Then, after He spoke, we’re told that

<sup>44</sup> The man who had died came out... John 11:44 ESV

To us this seems impossible, but when the eternal Word, by whom all things were made, speaks life to the dead, the miracle that follows shouldn’t be all that shocking. It should also come as no surprise on a far more basic level. Just as it is the nature of dead things to do what dead things do, it is the nature of living things to be among the living and to do all that is consistent with their nature.

That’s why no one had to coax Lazarus out that day. They didn’t have to stand there at the mouth of the tomb and persuade him that since Jesus had gone to all the trouble to raise him from the dead, the least he could do would be to show a little appreciation. “You have an obligation, Lazarus,” they might have said, but they didn’t, because they didn’t have to. Lazarus’ obligation, to obey the command of Christ, was nothing but pure joy in that moment. He was alive. The sickness and weakness was gone. To obey those words, “Lazarus come forth,” was what he wanted more than anything else in all the world, so, he didn’t even wait for someone to come in and unwrap the grave clothes. He came forth,

<sup>44</sup> ...his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth... John 11:44 ESV

He would have looked something like the Mummy in one of those 1950's horror films, but it didn't matter. He had a new life, and with his new life, he had received a new nature. So have we. So have all who have turned to God and found salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

### **Now We Are the Children of God.**

But not only do we have a life with a new nature, in Romans 8, Paul tells us that we also have a new family.

<sup>13</sup> For if you live according to the flesh you will die...

he wrote, for that's what happens to those who live by and for the flesh,

...**but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.** <sup>14</sup> For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. Romans 8:13-14 ESV

and this is the nature of those who have become the sons of God. Verse 15:

<sup>15</sup> For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear... Romans 8:15 ESV

as he also wrote to Timothy,

<sup>7</sup> ...God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. 2 Timothy 1:7 ESV

And, here in Romans,

<sup>15</sup> ...you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons...

See, it is the Holy Spirit who makes us sons—children—of God, and therefore it is by the Holy Spirit within us that

...we cry...

as our Savior did before us,

...“Abba! Father!” Romans 8:15 ESV

Verse 16 goes on to say,

<sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God Romans 8:16 ESV

and this is how He does it. He makes us part of the family. He brings us into relationship with God, not only as God, and Creator, and Judge, but as our loving Father. More still, He assures us that if we are children of God, then we are also heirs

<sup>17</sup> ...heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ... Romans 8:17 ESV

In other words, having been adopted into the family of God, we are given the hope of an inheritance. Peter wrote of this too. He said we have been

<sup>3</sup> ...born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...

That is,

<sup>4</sup> ...to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you... 1 Peter 1:3-4 ESV

Of course, Jesus Christ is the firstborn, and we will share this inheritance not only with Him, but also with more brothers and sisters than any one could ever count—that is the promise of God—but since the inheritance is limitless and eternal, there will be more than enough to go around.

Now, in the next few verses, we'll be talking about suffering, and, if the Lord is willing, we'll get to that next week, but for today, just one more thing. Since we have received the Spirit of adoption, we might be tempted to ask, "Then what family did we come from?" And there is an answer, but again, that's another sermon for another time. But let this be our focus this morning.

My wife, Lynda, is adopted, and over the years people have asked a very similar question. "Have you ever met your real parents?" they sometimes say. Her answer has always been the same. "Ron and Marg Morris," (the couple who adopted her when she was a baby), "are my **real** parents. They're the ones who gave me a home and a family, who raised me, and loved me. They were the parents that God meant me to have. They are my real parents."

And though it's true, we have been adopted into God's family, for today, all we really need is to recognize the enormity of what it truly means to be a child of God, and not in the liberal "We're all God's children," sense, but in the sense that

<sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God Romans 8:16 ESV

In the sense that we

<sup>15</sup> ...did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but [we] have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" Romans 8:15 ESV

In the sense in which

<sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ... Romans 8:16-17 ESV

We can't begin to comprehend it, of course. We just have to believe it, because it is

<sup>24</sup> ...in this hope we were saved...

as it says in verse 24, but

...hope that is seen is not hope... Romans 8:24 ESV

So, for now, we simply hold to this hope by faith, and we build our lives upon it, even as John, the Apostle, wrote, and I will close with his words.

<sup>2</sup> Beloved, we are God's children now...

right here, right now; this is the truth about those who are in Christ, still,

...what we will be has not yet appeared; but we *know* that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. <sup>3</sup> And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. <sup>1</sup> John 3:2-3 ESV